A Quarterly of New Literature

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R. V. CASSILL: Christmases of the Poet

ADRIEN STOUTENBURG: The Crystal Fields

BYRON COLT: St.-John Perse

JULIA MARIA MORRISON: Rounding April

KATHARINE TOPKINS: Forsaking All Others

DAVID GLADISH

HELEN NEVILLE

CAROL SHARPE

MYRON TURNER

40 CENTS

SUMMER 1960

ACCENT
ANTHOLOGY

edited by Kerker Quinn and Charles Shattuck and published by Harcourt, Brace & Co., is a 687-page selection from the first five volumes of the quarterly (1940–1945). Contents —

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ACCENT: University Station, Urbana, Illinois. Published quarterly under the auspices of the Department of English of the University of Illinois. Subscriptions: $1.50 for one year, $2.50 for two years in the United States (elsewhere $1.75 for one year, $2.75 for two years). Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Entered as second-class matter Sept. 26, 1940, second-class postage paid at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1960, by ACCENT.

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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
Volume XX, Number 3 Summer, 1960

KATHARINE TOPKINS:

Forsaking All Others

It was already nineteen hours since Junior, the Alemans' eldest son, had left their home in Los Angeles to elope with Maria Torres.

"She's eighteen and she's shy and Junior says she's a very good clean girl," Rose Aleman said for the sixth time that afternoon, as though she were reciting part of a catechism.

"And pretty," her husband, Moises Aleman, said.

"I don't see why they had to do it that way," Mr. Aleman's mother, who had come from San Bernardino to consult, said. "Unless there was a *reason*."

"It might be like that, but it isn't," Mrs. Aleman said. "I knew she'd start that," she said menacingly under her breath to her husband, as though she was applying sanctions for his having a shameless parent.

"You don't get married in Las Vegas unless there's a reason," Mama said.

"I told you. Her people forced her to do it this way. They said she wasn't grown up enough to get married, and they hardly even let her out on dates," Mrs. Aleman said. "Junior would call for her and they wouldn't let her come out. Her folks are from Mexico and they aren't used to the different ways here. Like when the kids had their blood tests three weeks ago, maybe four, she told them she was going to the grand opening of that new Price-Rite market over on Pico. Yesterday, her folks they took off for the dog races in Tijuana and Maria left."

"Blood tests, what did they need with blood tests," Mama said, "if they were running off to Nevada?"

"They hoped up to the last that her folks would come around and they could get married in L. A. They'll get married maybe later in the Church."

"I don't like the ring of it," Mama said. "What kind of people does she come from that they won't let her out? There's a reason why they don't trust her."

"That's all I know about it, what I told you, just the facts of the case," Mrs. Aleman said. "All we have to go on is what Junior told us last night when they left. They would be back today or else call. If they made it to Las Vegas before midnight, they got married last night. If not, then he got her a room at the Y and they got married this morning. That's all we know, Mama. That's all we've got to go on."

"The Y where, if they didn't get to Las Vegas?" Mama wanted to know.

"The Y wherever they did get to," Mrs. Aleman said coolly.

"If they left Vegas at eight," Mr. Aleman said, "then they should be back in L.A. by now." He had the map from the glove compartment, self-sliced at the folds, spread out on the dining room table, as though he expected his son's red and black Mercury suddenly to loom in bas relief on one of the chocolate peaks at the California-Nevada border.

"Who said they were leaving at eight?" Mama said.

"That's right, Mama," Mrs. Aleman said, her spatula poised as though she meant to swat something, above the tortillas she was frying. "Nobody said they would leave by eight. God knows they may not have been married till 9, 9:30, maybe 10."

"I don't like it," Mama said darkly.

"She never likes anything," Mrs. Aleman hissed at the tortillas. "Nothing."

"And another thing," Mama persisted, "if they're planning on living with you, why the down payment on four rooms of furniture?"

"I told you, only the bedroom set is here now. They'll use that and the rest they'll leave at the store and keep paying it off until Junior can save up to rent them a place of their own. That's all. It's better that way. It's stuff they'll need anyway."

Jesus Aleman, who was ten and had been complaining that he was hungry and when did they eat, interrupted his lament for a bulletin: they were back, the Mercury was turning into the driveway.

"All right," Mrs. Aleman said in an official presiding-matron tone.

"Now remember, she's shy so everyone be nice and natural. She's got on the dress Junior bought her yesterday," she said, parting the lace curtains for a peek. "She couldn't bring out any clothes with her—she was afraid the neighbors would see her with a suitcase and ask questions—just the pedal pushers she had on, and it wasn't right she should get married in pants. I told him to get a 12, but I think now a 10 would have been better across the shoulders."

"Are you married?" Mr. Aleman shouted from the steps, making a megaphone of his hands.

"Of course they're married," Mrs. Aleman said.

Maria peered nervously into the grey depths of the rear view mirror to see whether her lipstick was smeared before sliding out.

"That other one's my grandmother," Junior whispered.

"Mama, this is Maria," Mrs. Aleman said.

"Maria," Mama said, as though it were the name of some strange new material which had been called to her attention. "Come over here to the light, child, so I can get a good look at you, Maria."

Maria walked slowly as though she were at a party carrying beans on a knife. Did they want her in the full sun, or just closer?

"Come on, child, I won't bite you," Mama said.

Maria moved one step nearer, twisting her wedding band with her thumb.

"Not much flesh on her bones," Mama said. "On the pale side."

"She gets kind of carsick," Junior said.

"Well, she's not in the car now," Mama said.

"Let her sit. Get her a chair, Jesus," Mrs. Aleman said to her second son.

"When did you get married?" Anita, Junior's little sister, said. "Today or yesterday?"

"This morning," Junior said. He was shaking his father's hand, formally, as though they were partners.

"Then the 25th is your anniversary for ever and ever. We thought maybe it was going to be the 24th," Anita said. "But we didn't write it in the Hallmark book yet."

"We didn't get there in time last night," Junior said.

"Show her the bedroom set," Anita piped. "Show it to her."

"She hasn't seen it yet?" Mama said.

"I told you they wouldn't let her out very often," Mrs. Aleman said. "Junior picked it out."

"Let's all go out for something to eat first," Mr. Aleman said. He

clapped his hands like an amiable but imperious genie. "We're having a wedding feast. It's all been decided. At the Sampan Restaurant in El Monte where we went two Easters ago." No one was paying any attention.

"They've got presents to open too. All that stuff from where Junior works," Anita said, dancing about on one foot.

For Maria the past twenty-four hours had been filled with immeasurable confusion. She was single, she was married, she was in Los Angeles, she was in Las Vegas, she was back in Los Angeles. She had nothing, she had presents. She had parents, she had parents-in-law. She had a bike. The bike was left behind. She had half a '54 Mercury. But above all, a firm gnawing doubt rode in the pit of her stomach: her parents, had they got the note? Was it right to leave it where they did—threaded onto the rabbit ears of the television? The antenna had left two jagged holes in the paper like stigmata. Would it have been better propped between the violent green ceramic dishes of the lazy Susan? No. Put it on the bed, then, Junior had said. Against the pillows. No. Curl it like a note to the milkman, then, in that vase there. Hurry. And the note itself—"Going to get married, don't worry, Maria." Was one of the other notes better? The ones she had stuffed into the pocket of her pedal pushers—"Going to Las Vegas." No. "Don't worry, love, Maria," no. She loved them, but she couldn't say that. And she couldn't bring herself to say "I" either. She tried one "I Maria," but that was wrong. Should she have locked the door? If she didn't she would seem careless. She had locked the door, and they would, when they returned, have to search out the key on the ledge in the garage, groping doubtfully into the spider webs behind the paint cans. What if it wasn't there still, the key? What if they never got the note? It blew away. Her little sister took it. The repair man came for the T.V.

As Anita led them down the hall Junior was thinking that he wanted to show Maria the bedroom set himself, let her find in private the little treat he had secreted in the top drawers of the night stand with its new-wood smell and dustless corners. Two Almond Joys and a bag of Laura Scudder peanuts. Maybe he should have got two bags. He hoped his grandmother wouldn't find them. "What's all this," she would say.

"Don't you like it?" Anita was saying. "Aren't you going to say anything? Don't you think it's just beautiful? It's got six drawers in the dresser and mother put towels in the bottom for you. See, they

open easy, we put soap on the runners so they would slide." Maria ran her hand obediently along the sleek black top of the headboard, black with a grain of white running through like the threads in overripe avocados.

"Leave her alone, let her look herself," Mrs. Aleman said, waving her apron at Anita. If she was home, Maria reflected, she might be the one to get scolded. But she wasn't home.

Mama passed perilously close to the secret drawers with their gold knobs slit across the middle, but she was diverted by the clock in the shape of a ship's wheel sitting on top of the night stand. "Fancy," she said, stopping to study the movement of the green second hand. "Those fancy ones are like car clocks, none of them work for long."

"The Mr. and Mrs. dresser is Nevamar on the top," Anita chirped furtively.

"We have an end table like that, my folks have," Maria said. "We better call Mother."

"She says she wants to call her mother," Mrs. Aleman relayed to the audience in the living room. "That's right, honey. That's the right thing to do. Junior, you talk to them, it's only right you should."

"I thought the cat had got her tongue," Mama said.

"I can't talk to them," Junior said morosely. "They don't like me."

"Well, somebody's got to call," Mrs. Aleman said. "And it isn't proper she should have to tell them herself."

"You go ahead," Junior said. "You call."

"I couldn't do that unless *she* was to say it was what she wanted," Mrs. Aleman said in the direction of her new daughter-in-law. Maria nodded silently from the doorway where she was standing.

"Do you want to talk to them?"

Maria nodded again.

The first time around Mrs. Aleman fumbled the dialing. "This has really got me nervous," she said by way of explanation. She stopped to unkink the cord before trying again.

"Hello, this is Rose Aleman. (It's your brother.) Yes, she's here and she's fine. They got married this morning. They just got back. (He says your mother's taking it hard. She's in bed and she's taken six aspirin already.) He's eighteen too. A good steady boy and he doesn't drink. (She says to tell you her ankles are all swelled and she has a stitch in her side. Under the ribs.)"

"Ask her to bless us," Maria said in a strange high voice.

Mrs. Aleman relayed the message. "He says," she reported, hand

over phone, "she can't bless you now, maybe later"—a lie, uttered for comfort, but a lie all the same, a venial sin she would have to carry on her conscience.

Maria was sobbing noiselessly. The familiar well-loved faces of her family surged up in memory—her mother, her father, her sister Dolores (she would forget to feed the bird and she might use up the perfume), her brother Stephen—their perspectives slightly distorted, like images reflected in water, her mother looming largest and longest and saddest. Her crying became audible. "It's that I was their favorite," she said when the receiver was back in place, an anchor retracted. "That's the trouble."

"You're a little nervous," Mrs. Aleman said. "It's natural for a bride. It's all right. All you have to do is love each other. Your mother'll come around when she sees you're happy."

Maria nodded through her tears.

"We'll get something to eat and you can open your presents and you'll feel better. It all takes time."

Junior was rubbing Maria's right shoulder forlornly.

"One thing's a barbecue set," Anita said. "You can see the writing through the paper."

"Shame on you for prying," Mrs. Aleman said.

Maria undid the presents. A plastic table cloth. Little skunks with salt and pepper holes in their tails. A planter set in a filigree crown of gold. A set of snowflake coasters. The barbecue set.

"She broke the ribbon twice, that means twins," Anita said.

Junior said that if they were going out to dinner, they better get going.

"They want to make it to Long Beach before dark," Mrs. Aleman interpolated.

"Why Long Beach?" Mama said.

"Well, it's the ocean and everything like that and they're going to rent a room there tonight. Tomorrow is soon enough to start living here. They'll come back tomorrow."

"What's the matter, they going swimming?" Mr. Aleman said.

"The ocean is *there*, that's all. They want to see the ocean."

"You want to follow us?" Mr. Aleman said to his son.

"O.K., sure."

"Can I go with them?" Anita said.

"She wants to know, can she ride with you," Mrs. Aleman said to Junior and Maria.

"Sure. I suppose so," Junior said.

Maria nodded.

"Go on, get in," Junior said to Maria. He wished they wouldn't all stand there watching.

They got to the Sampan so early that the neon sign wasn't lit yet and part of the restaurant was still upside down, chairs on tables, glasses on top of glasses.

"See the bark picture." Mrs. Aleman said to her daughter-in-law, while the waiters were setting up for them. "That's what we need, something like that for over the fireplace."

Maria studied the brown pagodas. On the hump of a bridge a couple idled.

"They do it with Hawaiian ferns. You can make your own from kits," Mrs. Aleman said.

"Cantonese dinner for two you get sweet and sour pork," the waitress said, depositing a plate of fortune cakes and a glass cruet of soy sauce. "Dinner for three, you add Sub Gum Wonton, dinner for four you get Cashew Nut Chicken, dinner for five you get Chinese Green Pea Chop Suey, dinner for anything more than five you get A Special Dish. It's O.K. to order dinner for more than five even if you're only five, that is if you don't want full portions for the children."

They sat studying the menus, Anita peeking up through her lashes at Maria. Extra plate, 15 cents extra, not responsible for lost articles, prices subject to change without notice.

"What'll the bride have?" Mr. Aleman said.

"I think the hamburger plate and tossed green salad with choice of dressing," Maria said.

"She's over under American dinners," Mrs. Aleman said.

"She comes to a Chinese restaurant and she has an American dinner," Mama said. "That way we won't get the Special Dish."

"We better all order together," Junior said to Maria, "and you can get a salad on the side."

Maria nodded.

"Let her have what she wants," Mr. Aleman said. "They've got veal cutlet and chicken-fried steak too if she wants."

"What's this Chinese scrambled egg?" Mr. Aleman wanted to know of the waitress.

"That's à la carte. It doesn't go with the dinner."

"O.K., I understand that, but what is it?"

"What kind of a dinner is that?" Mama said. "A Chinese scrambled egg. You don't eat sensible anymore."

"Now, Mama, I was just *asking*."

When the ordering was finally settled they started cracking fortune cakes. "Mine's empty," Mama said. "I suppose they think an old lady can't have a fortune anymore."

"It just slipped out, Mama," Mrs. Aleman said. "We'll find it. Maria, what does yours say?"

"Made by the Hong Kong Noodle Company," Maria read.

"She's got the wrong side," Jesus hooted, and he and Anita began to giggle.

"Here," Junior said, " 'spread laughter and cheer among your fellow workers.' "

"That's a nice one," Mrs. Aleman said, patting Maria's forearm.

"Do you want to try chopsticks?" the waitress said.

"Yah, yah," Jesus and Anita chorused.

"I guess that settles that," Mr. Aleman said.

"Ohoh. She's got three leaves in her cup," Mama said peering into Maria's green-rimmed earthenware bowl with its fissure-veins of clay.

"What does that mean?" Mrs. Aleman said.

"Oh, I couldn't feel free to say."

"Oh come on, grandma," Jesus said. But Mama stood by her guns. Under the circumstances, she wasn't for telling.

"You can't use two hands," Mr. Aleman said. "Just hook your middle finger in there, like this." A load of rice slid back onto the squat yellow terrain of egg foo young, and the children laughed.

Maria helped herself to mustard. It issued forth from the plastic cylinder with a vulgar splat, which made them all look at her. She stared hard at the vermilion sauce and in the center a yellow pustule like the focus of a wound.

The almond cakes came last, cookies buttoned in the middle like sofa pillows. Maria nibbled in a circle to make hers last longer, licking the pads of her fingers free of crumbs after each half turn.

Mr. Aleman squinted at the bill, total to components, to total, lining up the columns, and then finally reached into the labial folds of his wallet.

"Let me see," Mama said. "I'll get the tip."

"Don't let her," Mrs. Aleman, who was sitting on the other side of him, hissed. "She just wants an excuse to see the bill. It's none of her doing. Maria's salad was extra, and I don't want her saying anything."

As an evidence of good faith, Mama plunked down fifty cents, and followed it after some searching with two dimes. "It's taken care of," she said.

They waited by the bamboo door while the change came down the metal chute on the side of the cash register and landed on the rubber cushion with green spikes. It made Maria think of the shampoo brush she had left behind.

Drink Pepsi Cola, it said at the top of the chute. "How many are you?" the cashier said.

"Seven," Mr. Aleman said, helping himself to a toothpick.

The cashier counted out seven mints in green and silver wrappers and handed them around. "I wonder how come she did that," Mr. Aleman said once they were out on the street. "They're two cents apiece."

"Maybe they heard us talking and knew it was a wedding," Mrs. Aleman said.

This was the time Junior had been dreading, the leaving. He wished they would all just evaporate. Temporarily he covered the situation by pausing to read as many *Herald-Express* headlines as were visible in the green metal rack at the corner. It would be unethical to turn the paper over without paying for it, and he left himself stranded at the crease—*gunmen escaped in their late model*—. "Well, son?" his father said, his large hand on Junior's shoulder. Junior pretended he was still reading.

Mrs. Aleman gave Maria a squeeze. "We want you to be very happy always," she said, wiping a tear from her left eye. Maria wished her mother-in-law was coming too, but instead Mrs. Aleman climbed back into the front seat of their Chevrolet beside Mama (who had gas and couldn't wave), and motioned Anita and Jesus into the rear.

The first place the newlyweds stopped at just had housekeeping rooms and no, you couldn't see the ocean, it was two miles. At the next vacancy sign a woman's head appeared with a prominent overhang of jaw like eaves that narrowed into a long down-trough of neck.

"We want to see about a room," Junior said. "For me and the wife," he added, trying out his new status, hands in pockets.

"Where's your things?"

"Well, her mother wouldn't let her take things out."

"Her mother!"

"But I've got a bag in the car."

"Thought you said you were married."

"Oh yes. Yes, we are. We got married this morning in Vegas."

"Because we don't have any of that business here," she said as though the clarification had gone unnoticed. "I'll show you what I have left."

They took the room at the end of the hall with private bath and Junior banged open the window in an official gesture of possession. The furniture, he thought with pride, was not nearly as good as what he had been able to provide. No night stands. No ship's clock. An iron bedstead painted ivory. A light green bureau, cracked glass across the top, the typewritten Rules for Guests slipped under a corner. An occasional chair with wooden arms. A reading light with a tan parchment shade. Ducks circling a lake. A gilded radiator. He gave the mattress a prod with his fist. "Springy," he said. What to do next? In a book he read once the groom went downstairs to have a smoke, but they were on the ground floor already, and anyway he didn't smoke. He picked up the New Testament, Gideon Society, and began thumbing through—Luke, II Corinthians, Galatians—as though he was looking for his place. Back to Luke: *And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon.* No use, he couldn't concentrate.

Maria went into the bathroom to brush her teeth. The new brush she had got in Las Vegas hurt her gums. She watched the reddening eddy of the water. It reminded her of the eternal bloody fountain in the dentist's office which she spat into, restraining her bib with one hand. The day they had their Wassermans she thought she would surely die, watching the level of her blood rise relentlessly in the vial, the rubber tube cutting into her arm, Providence repaying her. What if her mother really *did* get sick this time?

She decided to change back into her pedal pushers, which she had brought with her knotted up in a turkish towel like a bather at the shore. Pedal pushers and her gray sweater, she reasoned, were more like pajamas than her dress was like a nightgown. One of the old notes fell out of a pocket along with a disintegrating Kleenex and a bobby pin. "Don't worry, love Maria." Love, love, love. She blew her nose and brushed away the shredded fuzz of the Kleenex.

When she emerged, she was barefoot. *And one of the scribes came and having heard them reasoning*—. He thought her feet were the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, brown and tiny with glossy plastic nails like red oilcloth. The bone on the side of her foot was bruised where her shoe rubbed.

He hadn't been sure till the very hour he had gone to call for her that she would really come this time. For three Saturdays now he had taken extra-thorough showers in case it turned out to be his wedding day and for three Saturdays they hadn't let her out. And now here he was married. He wondered whether the landlady meant that she didn't permit That Business regardless of whether they were married.

Maria was thinking of her sister Dolores whom she had slept with all the days of her life and who would now have the whole bed to herself. Maria knew how to stay over on her side and she didn't tug the covers except a little in the cold hours before dawn, and she compromised with her sister about how much air they would have. But now the requirements were different and she would be judged by alien standards.

She turned back the white spread with its waffle print and crept into the crisp cool luxury of ironed sheets which made her think somehow of the Halloween ghosts of her childhood.

Her fingers spread out that way against the white spread ended in fiery terminals, like a flower that had suddenly blossomed. Junior switched off the light, first memorizing the obstacles of furniture in his unfamiliar path. She was crying softly. "Is it the blessing?" he said. She nodded. She didn't know what it was, only that it was better to have a reason. "I could bless you," Junior said. They were both quiet for a while and he supposed she was waiting for him to begin. He tried to think what her mother might have said.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God," he began, "pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death...."

She was really crying. He shouldn't have picked anything with "mother" in it. He felt like crying too but he couldn't because he was the bridegroom.

He remembered the time he had found a whimpering puppy who had lost its way. It was all heartbeat, its lightly golden-furred ribs fragile against his jacket. What to do with it at night? He had placed it in bed beside him, leaning on an elbow to watch. Midway in the vigil he had fallen asleep. He reached out and drew Maria to the shelter of his warmth. He felt the tickle of her hair and the warm mysterious curve of her spine.

To Maria it was like awakening from a confused dream to find she was home after all, guiltless and secure, and free of sleep's dark anguish. For a moment she might have been rocking in the arms of her mother and thinking nothing, nothing at all.

ADRIEN STOUTENBURG:

The Crystal Fields

(A narrative poem in process on the last expedition of Robert F. Scott, who, with four companions, died on the journey back from the South Pole, 1912.)

I.

THE LAND

That world was some glass-maker's error,
a heap of tumblers pouring wind
and the stems of mountains breaking,
panes and blown patterns grinding
into the whale-backed sea
where clouds froze to drowning statues.
Furnace or hand went cold
and the dying bellows wheezed
with a reptile sigh
and the epoch became a diamond
larger than us and Australia coupled,
yet left one peak steaming like a horse
over the still and fruitless meadows.

The continent creaks on its wide gallows,
perpetual skull with a blizzard's hair
and the weedless eyes of lost explorers
staring at petrels blown like more snow
in the wind's cape. Skua gulls, web-footed,
make a trail of red leaves
around the penguin's blinded child.
Hot food is sweet, as dead men know
who crawled through the skull,
drank bloodless tea,
kicked back the killer
at the world's wild edge,
dragged their shadows like fallen beggars
until the blue spice of a crevasse

whipped their nostrils and they saw the land open
down trenches of jackknives;
hung in harness, pulled their shadows closer,
staggered on to the deeper crystal,
found the killer, at the center, waiting.

All maps are drawn where men have drawn
their own hearts over the unknown landscape
and the cloven brain imagines ravines
more easily crossed than its own fissures.
There a man walked on common water.
Here five sank through the transparent world
into a death we sometimes remember.

The last expedition is never the last
and loaves of frost are never divided
into a multitude of fishes
and the skua must feed on the kidney he finds
or the eyes that come like a light to meet him
in his hunger-darkness. The hooked beak drives
all but speech into the waste
of breaking tumblers and grinding patterns,
and words are written.

THE WORDS: (From Scott's Journal)

The small green tent and the great white road . . .
The hiss of the primus . . .
The whine of a dog . . .
The neigh of our steeds . . .
The driving cloud of powdered snow . . .
Two minutes in the open makes a white figure . . .
The crunch of footsteps . . .
The eternal silence . . .
The blizzard . . .
The crevasses . . .

The deep, dreamless sleep that follows . . .

SCOTT

He was strenuous, neat,
almost too proper,
cried like a woman,
grew faint at blood,
polished his medals,
made service a savior,
stood for his portrait
with his thinning hair parted,
worshipped the Navy,
adored his mother,
loved his wife,
wanted his son
to study nature;
shot his bolt, muddled,
missed getting through,
proved that the English
can die well on their journeys;

walked nine hundred miles out
and a million miles back,
wrote fevered letters
with an icy pencil,
consoling widows, brothers, fathers,
scrawled, "My whole heart
goes out in pity,"
studied his blackening toes
and wondered
if the knife would hurt
if it came to cutting;

remembered Evans,
the giant treasure;
remembered Oates,
tender with ponies,
both of them under
the great road and whitening;

studied the silver sloth of his hand
unable to make a pencil stamp
as feet had stamped,
stumbled, pounded
to batter the miles
like bloody hammers
to the last tent,
    the last word,
        the beginning of mercy.

He was too thorough,
Strung action out
Beyond the dream's limit,
Packed his doubt

On a sticking sledge.
His own ghost straddled
The runner's edge
And the wind raddled

Hope and despair
Into one white braid;
He was never a coward
But half-afraid

To be less than a hero;
Had put behind him
The weakling's itch
To sit by the dim

Hot light of books
And a country fire.
Duty demanded
That purpose acquire

Muscles and dogs.
He made the endeavor,
Took one step,
And went on forever.

II.

THE JOURNEY OUT

They left their base and October behind them,
the flag of empire curled on their sledges,
lured by the world's end, the southern tiptoe,
hub where all spokes of the turning map
plunged to a dot they could be first to conquer:
twelve men, eight ponies, the Russian dogs
running and tumbling, the ponies' manes lifting
like little trees. Horses hated the wind,
foraged for shelter, bucked at the death-smell
from a far glacier where they would be freed
of loads forever, their bullet-smoked haunches
sorted and eaten, ribs, hearts, livers
stored in a cairn flying the black flag
of a darker nation.

Oates

Oates, the dragoon, the Iniskillin lover
of horseflesh and crystal and deathly adventure,
tobacco-chewer, slogger, judge of stallions,
wrestled the cold manes, fussed with fodder,
oil cakes, bran, built barns out of blizzards,
coaxed the pale hoofs of conquest closer,
heard the mare's whinny on the wind,
stroked a muzzle with pity in his palm,
said their names over and tried to forget them—
Jehu and Nobby, Chinaman, Snatcher—
chewed his pity and coughed it out
to make a brown flower in a white stable.

Tractors led the way, mechanical hope
riding on rollers, engines shuddering
in the hot cold that fired blizzards
into white sparks. Marchers, trapped
on blowing pavements, cheered the machines
they had not believed in, and their leader
hoped in spite of not hoping

while his great toys groaned across the Barrier
and the white road was blotched
with their black drippings
for a day, two days, five days, seven . . .

The throttle froze to the engineer's fingers
and his breath stroked like another engine,
knowing the metal veins could burst
and the rollers break like the ice
on his forehead, but driving, driving
into the waste.
Cylinders split
in the crush of cold and the dark snouts rolled
into their graves without a whinny,
black ribs, black spines, dead spark and throttle
left to the jaws of a thousand winters.

Tracks of ponies, dogs, man-haulers
made a blue wreath of footsteps around them,
going on toward the Beardmore ice and the summit
and the bullets waiting for Chinaman and Jehu.
All could not last until the glacier
and these were the crocks, the weakening members.

Jehu went first,
made four feedings
for the dogs which must run
their longer journey.

Chinaman walked
to the brink of December.

The rest limped on
with their manes blowing,
only four bags
of fodder among them
and seventy miles
to the end of their haul—
hundreds more for men—
and the land showing peaks
through the window of distance.

The window broke
and the tents trembled
like the green skin
of pointed beasts,
while only time marched
toward any conquest.

Four days and four nights
and ribs showing.

One must stick it out
and hope for the best.
In a brief spell of hope
last night
one heard laughter.

But rations must be stolen
from the future
for the howl of wind
was the howl of hunger
in spite of red, sweet
bones and haunches—
Christopher, Michael—
food for dogs
and English heroes.

It is evil to lie here . . .
watching the mottled
wet green walls of our tent,
the glistening wet bamboos,
the bedraggled sopping socks . . .
to hear the falling snow
and the ceaseless rattle
of fluttering canvas . . .
to feel the wet clinging dampness
of everything touched.
Add the stress of sighted failure
of our whole plan . . .
But, yet, after all,
one can go on striving . . .

WILSON

Sleeping bags were wet, but Wilson drew
the day profile of a penguin in his diary,
the lean hand dreaming of rookeries
he had not reached through a hell of trying;
doctor, scholar, "tough as steel in the traces,"
although he had lived through thirty-nine winters
(but no summer like this)
with a spirit designed to burn through drifts
or hack a cliff down for the sake of a glint
of an unknown mica, metal, fossil.
Birds' eggs had beauty, and the aurora
streaming like the hair of some tall mermaid.
He sketched them, carried their brittle portraits
among the flags and food and the opium
saved for some moment of decision,
while his pockets creaked
with stone discoveries.
One could never be weighed down
by the granite of knowledge,
and snow-blind eyes could see the glory
of conquest and science standing together
where he and Scotty would stand and unfold
the Union Jack on the turning axis.

They marched again,
the last march for ponies.
One pony endured
on a feast of biscuits
a lean hand spared
from its gaunt, day's ration.

Men, said the doctor,
to his windy stomach,
could endure hunger
better than horses,
and watched Nobby canter
on stilts like legs—
and dreaded the bullet
that life required.

BYRON COLT:

St.-John Perse

The difficulty commentators experience in dealing with the work of St.-John Perse[1] has been well attested to in the past. It seems that criticism of the poetry tends by a natural process to become eulogy or paraphrase. But the failure of the analytical equipment to come to grips with the work is itself a significant clue to its nature. We will use this insight to examine Perse, with the intention not of mapping the mountain ranges of his poetry, but rather of helping to define the force which raised them in different phases over a long period of time.

Two natural elements are conspicuous in the world of his first important book, *Praises* (1911): the sea and the volcano. The former is a calm background to many scenes, lending them a dreamlike or idyllic character; the latter is more sinister, dominating the landscape with its violet clouds and causing the earthquakes which disrupt the world of these poems. From it come the perturbations, both atmospheric and spiritual, which the poet finds delight in. It is in the aftermath of a tremor as zinc coffins are borne through the streets and piled in the shed of the market that a giant Negro dressed in an old sack assumes the stature of a prophet as he is viewed against the discolored sky, and a little later, under the same iron roof, a bald man in the grip of a similar crisis shouts, "I am god!"—and is taunted by the crowd. These two men in themselves embody the disoriented forces of nature, the atmosphere of panic and power which Perse has an eye for in all his poetry from the "tall water clocks on the march" in *Anabasis* (1924) to "the black wool of typhoons" in *Winds* (1946). This affinity of

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[1] The pen-name of Alexis Léger, whose career Wallace Fowlie has summarized as follows: "Alexis Léger was born in 1887, on a coral island near Guadaloupe, Saint-Léger-les-Feuilles, which belonged to his father's family. His early years were spent there and on Guadaloupe itself where his mother's family owned plantations. At the age of eleven he went to France to complete his education. In 1914 he entered the Diplomatic Service, and was sent to China in 1917. In 1922 he attended the Disarmament Conference in Washington in his capacity as expert on the Far East, and then accompanied back to Paris Aristide Briand, whom he served for the next ten years. . . . At Briand's death, in 1932, Léger became permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs. At the capitulation of France, in 1940, Léger, rather than submit to appeasement, left for England, and arrived in Canada on July 14th. Archibald MacLeish offered Léger a post at the Library of Congress where the French poet took up an important service for the library and French letters. . . . He still lives in Washington today." (Wallace Fowlie, *A Guide to Contemporary French Literature,* Meridian Books, N. Y., 1957, pp. 247-48.)

Perse makes us remember a more common view of the "volcanic" aspect of nature expressed by two fine artists, the first of them Leopardi in *The Broom-Flower*. On the side of Vesuvius the Italian poet sees only the broom and solid lava where there were once country houses and fields. The thought caused by the sight is above all that of the emptiness of man's "magnificent and progressive destinies" and the folly of his fratricidal struggle in the face of nature's implacable hostility. His verse reaches its most moving heights as he elaborates on the weakness of men. "Nature has no more regard or care for the seed of man than for the ant's," he says, and observes that a perturbation of the earth only a little stronger than the ancient eruption could annihilate the whole race in a few moments. We remember also Lafcadio Hearn's account of his ascent of Fujiyama: how he first saw the cone across the flat fields of Japan, violet-colored and with a line like that of a slack cable stretched across a great space. In successive stages he penetrated this illusion of distance, pulled upwards from relay to relay by the porters to the desolation of the crown itself. The view of Leopardi and Hearn on the Medusa-like quality of nature in her more extreme moods is one which Perse does not hold. His representation of man's power throughout his poems is the antithesis of Leopardi's as his love for nature in her waste places and desolate aspects is the opposite of Hearn's. In his work is implicit the assertion that man is not weak, that he can lift himself to the measure of nature and dominate her, that his destiny is not circumscribed but in fact "all the roads of earth eat out of his hand." In trying to discover the reason for this we can perhaps come to understand better the motivation of Perse's achievement and answer for ourselves a question borrowed from *Winds* and applied to the work: *"qu'on me dise le mobile!"*

A suggestion of what this power may be is contained in an analysis Sartre devotes to Jean Genêt,[2] laying stress on the medieval quality of Genêt's thought: in his work we rediscover the view of man as a microcosm, the task of language being not simply to describe things but to contain the trees and flowers themselves in the words which name them. Sartre says that the first *"livre atroce"* of Genêt, *Notre Dame des Fleurs,* is sometimes filled with the naive poetry of astrolabes and the first world maps. He also speaks of its romanesque taste and its implicit reminiscence of feudalities and military hierarchies. He notes also Genêt's tendency in seeing the perfect confusion and night of the world about him to will it into a drama of which he himself is the

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[2] Jean Paul Sartre, *Saint Genêt, Comédien et Martyre* (Gallimard, Paris, 1952).

hero, guided through great trials and tasks, led to the edge of despair, but still the purpose of the entire process. It is instructive to compare this perspective with Perse's, first of all in *Praises*. The child of these poems sees nature as a spectacle designed solely for his delight. He is exempt from all the ills normally attending human beings and can take pleasure equally in the corpse-like color imparted to a little girl by the tropics and in the thought of a man going to the city reservoir with his vials of poisons. As with Genêt, the world is a place which has him as its "*prétexte chéri.*" Unlike Genêt, however, he has been elevated not in order to suffer, to hate himself and to do evil, but to be beloved, to live in a house full of servants, to own a horse and to take pride in his aristocratic forbears. In his book on Genêt, Sartre names three medieval edifices which our century has seen erected in the area of the novel: the work of Giradoux, Joyce's *Ulysses,* and Genêt's *Notre Dame des Fleurs.*[3] As regards poetry some such remark might apply to Perse, but it would have to be put differently: Perse is one of the few men undertaking "reactionary" works in our time who has been able successfully to make a certain spiritual reversion.

What this implies is shown already in *Praises*. The writer of these poems dominates circumstance by a process in which he himself is arbitrary and violent in a way that matches the violence and caprice of nature. The poet kills (or it is suggested that he kills) the hummingbird with a pebble; he dreams of going up to the sick man in the boat and tormenting him; takes delight in all kinds of intoxications from that of the black sorcerer to the man in the yellow shirt who thinks he is god, and from the solitary man "who puts his nose in his armpit" to the streets of the town filled with heat and the odor of frying. Already in *Praises* Perse "learns a science from the spirit's cruelties." Yet this hardness is not indulged for its own sake; implicit in the work is the idea that a man in the grip of a certain spirit can dominate nature. In the first poem of *Praises* we are given the picture of a Dreamer awakening from a dream filled with "violence, ruses and brilliance." The Dreamer does not take charge of the writing at this stage as does a similar Stranger, Enchanter or Narrator in later works. Here he is simply the child "with dirty cheeks" waking up and going downstairs to get his food. But the force which he feels in himself and the world has analogies with that which motivates later works. To describe this force we can best borrow a term used by ethnologists and psychologists. We are told that there exist certain religions among primitive peoples whose chief tenet is that everything revolves around a universal magic

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 441.

power called *mana*. Their view is that every object possesses a certain potency which is not that of a spirit but can be described most simply as energy. These are the so-called "dynamistic religions."[4] Their central idea is not to be confused with animism. The force investing objects is a kind of unmoral force distinct from soul. It may do good or evil, it may be favorable or dangerous. When one has been very moved by something occurring outside one, it is this force that causes the sensation.

"In the face of something extraordinary it is not [man] who is astonished but rather the thing which is astonishing. It is *mana*—endowed with magic power."[5]

"Among certain Polynesians . . . when anything astonishing happens, the people cry out 'Mulungu!' " [*i.e., Mana*].[6]

In a sense the author of *Praises* is crying out this word to all the varied things composing his universe in which there are no distinctions between pleasant and unpleasant, good and bad, but simply objects filled with varying degrees of power. The coffin of the poet's little sister smells good; "sweat opens a fresh road"; and at the end of a creek a dog is the best meal for a crocodile. Everything in this tropical atmosphere—where the concept of power is very much at home— is in itself astonishing outside of the poet, and his task is only to set down the sensation. The poems as a result of this point of departure give one the feeling that words contain *"les fleurs qu'ils designent"* (as Sartre says of Genêt's writing). And it is not only the combined manneredness and vigor of *Praises* that remind us of a man who died in a tropical colony of France five years before they were written. Their way of achieving supremacy over things reminds us of the order Gaugin sought in a primitive country in which he could function as the enchanter and himself be a kind of despot through his art. The relevance of this parallel is shown by the nature of Perse's next work in which what was fundamentally a child's perspective becomes erected into a system. We are told that *mana* is inherent in any deed out of the ordinary—anything which surpasses the normal power of a man. Such for example would be the march of Xenophon to the Euphrates or the travels of Marco Polo in Asia (a

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[4] C. G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (Meridian Books, N. Y., 1956), p. 78. See also R. H. Blyth, *Haiku* (Hokuseido, 1952), p. iv.

[5] C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (N.Y., Harcourt Brace & Co., 1933), p. 161.

[6] C. G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, p. 78.

work which Perse had evidently read before he wrote *Anabasis*). And it is this force which the poet successfully calls upon to aid him in his own attempt to dominate his subject. Implicit in *Anabasis* is the idea that the poet can compel this force. But the basic capriciousness of the power is shown by certain *tics noirs* of the poet who sees the wash on the slope "scatter / like a priest torn in pieces," the child to whom it has not occurred yet "to knock out the eye of the colt," and, at the end of the work, "the maneuvers of two men over a field for the rape of a woman." The poet can even be uncertain whether he wants to share his gift with his fellow men, and in certain moods desires to go off alone, telling "no one to wait." But one of the most significant things about this work is that the relationship of the poet to those about him is defined more clearly than it was in *Praises*. The poet of this epic is a seer, a man who by a special *ascesis*—involving, we can assume, many trials—has attained the point where he can conduct force into the lives of those about him and give them meaning. He exists among men for this single task—transmitting the force he has acquired on his "roof" among all the energies and omens of the natural world. And we may for a moment consider certain extrinsic aspects of Perse's great success in this view of his function.

We have already said that Perse was one of the few men in whom the "reversion" this concept implies was successful. The poet by some accident of birth was adapted to this role in a manner in which others were not. In Europe at the time *Anabasis* was written a reaction was getting under way that was to be called by the names of "dada" and "Surrealism." The men in these movements, however, were in active revolt against their environment, and their poems tended not to be incantations of joy and energy like those of Perse but rather incantations of destruction. It is with a trace of envy that Breton once referred to Perse as a *"surréaliste au loin."* [7] The problem involved here refers directly back to Rimbaud, one of whose most consistent efforts was that of turning himself into a seer through his poetry. But the chief barrier he found to this desire was his religious upbringing. *Season in Hell* is a long, agonized struggle with this problem. It is a somewhat dissatisfying work for all its brilliance because of its ironic impulsion. It is in motion everywhere; at one moment the poet asserts that he can be a seer, the next moment he reveals that he has been deluding himself and that the background of Christianity into which he has been born with its concomitants of bourgeois society and industrialism does

[7] Maurice Saillet, "Saint-Jean Perse," *Critique*, (Paris, October, 1947).

not permit this. He has been baptized; this is the central fact of his life, and he weighs his chances of being able to will an atavistic return to a state of innocence. His conclusion is that he can do this, but we have been previously so bedazzled by the Byronic interchange of heroics and irony that we may well question it. We have often, for example, seen the phrase, "One must be absolutely modern," which appears in the conclusion cited as if it were serious. It was in this way that Hart Crane used it as epigraph to *White Buildings*. In its context, however, it is evidently ironic. Two sections previous to the one in which it appears we read: " 'Nothing is vanity; give everything to science and forward! ' cries the modern Ecclesiastes, that is to say, *everyone*." Thus when Rimbaud says: "One must be absolutely modern. No canticles: hold the ground gained," he is speaking in the tone of "everyone" despite the fact that this appears in a section where he seems to be making a serious declaration. In the same way the final paragraph of the work is open to question. Taken by itself it is decidedly heroic but ambiguous in the light of its background. In these lines the author says that he will once more enter splendid cities at dawn, leaving behind all his old friendships to attain truth in one soul and one body. And yet after this we remember the opening lines of "The Impossible":

> "Ah that life of my childhood . . . more disinterested than the best of beggars, proud of having neither country nor friends, what stupidity it was!"

And the poet goes on in this section to lament his inability to leave the Occident behind spiritually and to cast off the historical burden which prevents him forever from attaining the truth "with its weeping angels." What we believe then when we finish *Season in Hell* is up to us. But Rimbaud's dilemma reveals to us what in a sense is the secret of Perse's whole achievement. Turning back to *Praises,* we realize that for this poet the white men had never landed on the shores of his world and forced him to submit to baptism. The only clergy in this work is that of the lime in the twelfth song, the dazzling whiteness which holds all kinds of ascetic intimations and radical knowledge for the poet as in the salt floes of *Anabasis* and the surf of *Exile* (1942). Perse has from the beginning, through an accident as it were, existed in the state of primitive innocence which Rimbaud never could find for all his efforts. Never once has he had to wrestle with the theological principles which were the direct cause of Rim-

baud's spiritual perturbation and the basic cause of Surrealist violence.[8]

Perse, who feels himself to be the member of an aristocratic race, goes from China, where a spiritual *ascesis* has crystallized his view of himself as a seer, to Europe where he applies his strength, not to aesthetic considerations but to power politics. Rimbaud, who felt himself to be "of an inferior race to all eternity," found his ambitions of being a seer fundamentally shattered in Europe and departed for desolate portions of the globe. Although he had dreamed of returning to Europe a rich man, able to get "mixed up in politics," he became a merchant in Abyssinia and there contracted a disease that hastened his end. At one time, while he was in Stuttgart studying German, his career as poet finished, he apparently thought of becoming a sort of Schliemann who was starting his excavations at Mycenae. But unlike the thorough Schliemann, he was unable to apply his linguistic abilities to commerce or to master the technique of making money. Instead of a Troy all that his later years unearthed was an insoluble economic problem.

Perse, on the other hand, became one of the most successful artists-men of action of our time who followed their destinies to strange parts of the world and who had to conquer in themselves the powerful nihilistic currents that we sense not only in *Anabasis* but in *The Royal Way* and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. For Anglo-Saxons not the least interesting fact about the fate of *Anabasis* was that the man to translate it into English was the author of "Gerontion." We can speculate that in much the same way that Laforgue translated Whitman, Eliot translated Perse. In the first case the spirit who saw the earth with its vermin swimming in the purity of space was drawn to the American's crude strength and delight in life; in the second case the American religionist was drawn to the French seer who had found the sources of a new energy. Perhaps we have here what Jung calls *enantiodromia,* or the concept that sooner or later everything runs into its opposite, a regulatory factor in the individual and collective psyche. And this point brings us to Perse's next work, *Exile,* written in America after a lapse of eighteen years, a poem in which the direction we have noted above tends towards its opposite.

I say "tends" because the strength Perse espoused when he started to write is never surrendered even in this work created at one of the darkest moments in the modern age and in the poet's life. One can be hesitant to take issue with a critic like Renato Poggioli, but I believe

[8] Best illustrated in the work of Lautréamont, "father" of Surrealism.

that the opposition he establishes in his monograph on Perse [9] between *Anabasis* and *Exile* is inaccurate and set up in the interests of a critical theory. Poggioli suggests that "the conversion from the poet of *Anabasis* to the poet of *Exile* is . . . a conversion from a primitive barbarousness to a Christian and Hebraic spirit," or from prehistory and the epic to history and the lyric. It is undeniable that some such change has taken place, but the emphasis which Poggioli gives it seems to be misplaced. Any strophes containing images in the slightest manner Biblical he seizes upon in the following way:

> The celebrator . . . of cities now prefers a most beautiful lament beside his wailing wall:
>
> "I have built on the abyss . . ."
>
> The bard and leader of cohorts . . . now expresses the vanity of military glory with a potent Biblical image:
>
> "Where there were great military actions already whitens the jaw of an ass . . ."
>
> And it is with an image worthy of a great mystic poet that he sings also of life as *vanitas vanitatum,* of the earth as *lachrymarum vallis*:
>
> "Thus goes all flesh to the hair-shirt of salt . . ."
>
> Thus even the Christian and evangelical spirit appears here, the most individual and most human story in the New Testament. Here we have the assertion that in this world, through the exile of the poet and of man, is gained no promised land,
>
> "To no banks dedicated, to no pages confided the pure start of this song . . ." [10]

But this last strophe, unfortunately for the theory, is followed by, "Others seized in the temples on the painted altar horns: My glory is on the sands! My glory is on the sands . . . ;" which is not a very elliptical way of rejecting formal religious solutions and asserting that exile does in fact remain for the poet "the promised land." In the first verse quoted by Poggioli [11] which continues,

> I will lie down in cisterns and in hollow vessels, In all stale and empty places where the taste of greatness lies,

is contained no assertion that cannot be found in *Anabasis,* in which the poet explicitly espouses the waste spaces and salt of the "rind of earth" where his standard of power most clearly emerges. And only

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[9] Renato Poggioli, *The Poetry of St.-John Perse,"* (reprinted from *Yale French Studies,* Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall-Winter 1948.)

[10] *Ibid.,* p. 16.

[11] *Ibid.,* pp. 16-17. I have translated the passages from Perse.

in three places—the third canto of *Anabasis, Snows* (1944) and the "Strophe" of *Seamarks* (1957)—has Perse ever been in any sense a celebrator of cities. The view of cities expressed as early as *Images for Crusoe* (1909) has been that most consistently held by the poet. When he does celebrate them it is because they have been placed under "the labials of a holy name," by either hieratic blessing or the benediction of a great natural phenomenon. In the second line cited by Poggioli is also contained nothing that was not implicit in *Anabasis* in the view of the desert hills stretching towards the horizon "where the peoples annihilate themselves in the dead powders of earth." The mere mention of a hair-shirt in the third fragment is not enough to turn Perse's vision of the world into that of a valley of tears, and the impetus of the powerful stanzas in the third section of the poem describing the course of inspiration throughout the world in all ages does not suggest that everything is vanity. The "Numidian spirit" of the poet which is mentioned in this section has very little to do with the Christian, evangelical bias which Poggioli believes he sees in him. In general there are to be found as many or as few Bibilical overtones in *Exile* as there are in *Anabasis.* A notable one in the latter work is to be found in the second canto whose *timbre* is strongly suggestive of the Sermon on the Mount passage in which Jesus defines adultery although its spirit is the exact converse. And Poggioli's desire to make the poet of *Exile* a participant in the Christian spirit approaches distortion when, in mentioning the catalogue we find in section six of *Exile,* he says that here we do not find an appeal "to the shepherds of the people and the sovereigns of intelligence, but to the flock itself, to the single creatures under the same curse of emigration and sweat." [12] Listed in this section are

> He who wanders at midnight in the stone galleries to assess the titles of a beautiful comet, he who watches between two wars over the purity of great lenses of crystal . . . he who unravels on the charts the closed course of cyclones . . . he whose heritage on land held in mortmain is the last heronry, with fine works on venery and falconry . . . he who gives hierarchy to the great rituals of language,

and many others who seem hardly to fit Poggioli's description. There is in this poem the recurring sadness and lament which Poggioli notes, but it is always explicitly rejected by the poet ("Be silent weakness . . ."). When Perse says in the poem's final words, "And it is the hour, O Poet, to decline your name, your birth and your race . . . ," Poggioli notes that the moment of revelation and confession has ar-

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 17.

rived for him.[13] Yet Perse in *Exile* has never divulged his name, his birth or his race. He has chosen instead to "strip off all human allegiance," to scorn the "questionnaire of the Port Authority" where his national and political affiliations are demanded, to live towards the dream of a greater energy ("a pure wrath") in the future. Because of his ultimate refusal to write poems of the moment he is truly a "precarious guest" in the country of his exile; a sadness weighs on him that he wrestles with throughout *Exile,* which he always succeeds in conquering but which gives to these poems a more moving quality than is to be found in anything else he has written.

And just as in *Anabasis* what enables the poet to vanquish his affliction is the *mana* of the seer. The people in the catalogue of *Exile* are men of authority whose vocation is charged with the energy we have seen described in ethnological books. There is about the man who "in sterile places watches over the fate of great telegraph lines" something of the same inscrutable power that there is in the "discharged warrior who has planted his spear at his threshold to tie up a monkey" (*Anabasis*) or even in the sight of the candy man fighting wasps that so affects the child who watches it that he "cannot close his fingers" *(Praises).* These things are filled with impersonal force just as are those objects which Claudel comments on in his paper on *Winds:*

> One thinks of those little sticks curiously carved, which, when they completed one another, used to serve as credentials for conspirators . . . Everything *means,* but nothing has significance save by the exclusion of the translation . . .[14]

That explains the constant reappearance throughout the work of the objects of kings or priests which possess an essential vitality that the poet uses to help him in what has been his constant battle against the forces of dissolution and death. The destructive power must be used and turned against itself; from the debris of museums can come things similar to the objects (mentioned in a letter to Archibald MacLeish) which can conquer the movement of history. This explains also why the Stranger at the start of *Anabasis* "places his finger in the mouth of the dead," and why the Narrator-Shaman at the beginning of *Winds* "has eaten of the rice of the dead." They do so the better to celebrate life, "the other provinces to my liking," "the fountains of the future." *Winds* shows us that to be in our day what Tityrus in

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[13] *Ibid.*

[14] St.-John Perse, *Winds* (Bollingen Foundation, Inc., N.Y., 1953), p. 228.

Valéry's "Dialogue of a Tree" calls "the instrument of the general favor of things" one can never remain stationary but must go on to absorb the evils of our time in a greater energy. As the forces of intolerance and violence spring up on all sides, the poet overcomes them and turns them to his own use. To do this requires a very great power, and in *Winds the* nature of the force invoked is clearly described. Ultimately it is not "the seed of the Indian cocculus" in *Anabasis* or the "stimulating leaf" in *Friendship of a Prince* (1924) which the poet desires, but a greater drunkenness which will keep him lucid and conscious of his authority. It is only this force which can aid him to compel those about him as he desires to do now. In *Winds* there is seen not the wish for an individual or hermetic mastery like that of *Anabasis* but rather the need to invoke the god "in the midst of the crowd." The poet has moved away from the inturned energy of the earlier phase to an open statement of his own task in his time. This results in a disappearance of most of the obliqueness and *tics* seen in the earlier work where the poet was engaged in a personal battle to subdue the world. And once again to describe the nature of the drunkenness which Perse advocates in *Winds* we can go to a man of science:

"World-*mana* passing through the gods cannot be destroyed," says Wolff in *Islands of Death,* where he examines the belief of Easter Island natives. But he goes on to say, "The organism of the man who is the receiver must correspond to the mana degree with which he is charged: otherwise short circuits will result . . ." [15]

Here we see the reason for the great fear in Perse lest the winds fail or the dread expressed in *Seamarks* of the time of drought "when death watched for us at every fall of the writing." Perse's enterprise is a dangerous one—as it was in the case of the American Transcendentalists—and to embark upon it needs a special kind of strength. It is possible to think of some whose attempt to dominate a certain kind of force ended differently than it has for Perse. Wolff says that the system of *tapu* (or tabu) was envolved among the natives to insure the uninterrupted circuit of *mana.*[16] There is only one such tabu or constantly repeated injunction in Perse: no matter what the cost, never to deny this great power. In *Anabasis* it is suggested that the man who cherishes his sorrow be killed; in *Winds* that if the man of talent chooses "the rose garden and the playing of the harpsichord" he be devoured by dogs. Perse, like Rimbaud, has never been concerned

[15] Werner Wolff, *Island of Death* (J. J. Augustin, N.Y., 1948), p. 163.
[16] *Ibid,* p. 167.

with aestheticism because it represents the lyrical and deceptive song of the Barbary bird we read of in *Exile* and a denial of the ultimate vigor he has been concerned with. His own search led him finally to "question the greatest Sea" and bring back a poem of a power whose equal in modern literature it would be difficult to name. We think of Wolff's "world-*mana*" in connection with the Master of Stars and Navigation in *Seamarks*. And how well did Perse in *Winds* express the essence of Wolff's own island: "stones raised on the periphery of shores and great averted figures with disdainful lips . . . "

With the reminiscence of these stones emerged "From volcanic *mana*" [17] we have come back to the volcano of our starting point and have made a suggestion concerning the moving power of these works. We have also suggested the reason for the uncertainty of the analytical power when confronting them and the tendency of commentators to lapse into quotation. There is meaning in this because the work is so thoroughly filled with *mana,* "the thing taken in its quick and entirety," that the critical power is helpless before it. This is illustrated clearly by thinking of a work like Kazantzakis' *Odyssey,* somewhat similar in scope and intention to Perse's epics. Kimon Friar in commenting on the *Odyssey* can without any hesitation sketch an intellectual background for it including Bergson, Nietzsche and Spengler and go on to extract a coherent philosophy from the poem. I do not believe that this is possible in the same way with Perse's poetry. It is true that from the *oeuvre* we can extract many principles similar to those Kimon Friar mentions:

> "Injustice, cruelty, longing, and war are leaders that push us on . . ." [18]

> " 'Erect your cities beside Vesuvius . . .' " [19]

In Perse also the love of the god for men resembles invective, and we find in the predestined violence of natural things the same tragic, exultant view which is characteristic of Nietzsche. But after the affinities have been suggested, only direct experience of the work will yield the meaning that goes beyond translation. And I do not know what this meaning inheres in if not what Rimbaud once called, "the pride more benevolent than the lost charities."

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[17] Compare the force in *Winds* with the qualities Dr. Wolff says the volcano on Easter Island symbolizes: "supreme power, movement, fire, destruction and creation . . . The *mana* force in the volcano was the eternal source of destruction but also of life; it was the symbol of the polarity of existence."

[18] Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey,* translated by Kimon Friar (Simon Schuster, N.Y., 1958), p. xiv.

[19] *Ibid.,* p. xv.

R. V. CASSILL:

Christmases of the Poet

(This is an excerpt from a novel about the poet Clem Anderson. The list of recollected Christmases was compiled—or invented—by Anderson on the Christmas after the end of World War II.)

1st. Borne to the tree. Remembered pine smell. Whence?

2d. Flight into Egypt. Father rode; Mother walked. Poet resolved to ameliorate this sexual chauvinism by art. Conceived a painting of Mother riding, Father walking and carrying me.

3d. Went to the tree unchanged, swag still in my diaper. Mother's eyes blue-anxious. Father had built barn out of orange crate. Detachable sides. Papier-mâché animals, color and texture of oatmeal inside the enamel, as revealed when broken. Cousin Martin broke horse and farmer. Excess of cousins. Uncomforted by parental lie that destruction of barn was unintentional. Cousin Martin intended by three Aristotelian causes to be destroyer.

4th. To Grandmother Clement's. Ford bucking in the blue-orange snowdrift beside the house. Inside, smell of sickness. Erysipelas, beloved of the Immortals. Forced recapture of the past with sugar cookies and apple cakes. Poet expected old lady to go for a trike. Fraud. Got cheap-looking large-mesh red stocking instead. Whipped for breaking Sister's first bisque doll. Intentional, but how could they *know?*

5th. Sled. Supposed to be boy's dream. Detested being crammed into two overalls and six sweaters and exposed on top of hill in park. Rude deprecation of older boys. Father, too, felt I was a sissy not to offer bolder contest to invincible Nature. Mittens wet, soppy. Tears frozen on cheeks. Boyish heart full of hatred.

6th. Disgraced by reason of sexual episode at school. Unforgotten on beaming Holy Morn. Present offered as injunction never to repeat. Grandfather Clement's jack-knife, honed thin while he lived. First act was to cut index finger to bone. Accused of menaces against Sister. Knife put away until poet was "old enough." Broke Sister's piano because it was cash purchase while knife was not.

7th. Entire family, including cousins, chipped in to buy poet a violin, because of talent. (? piercing treble in school singing? renderings from *The Magic Flute* on my kazoo? tapping foot while wearing earphones? Merely Mother's wish?) Immediately learned to produce sound like fire siren on E string. Broke bow by thrusting at Sister. Bought Mother framed poem from dime store. "Only Mother in the World." Touched her. Showed poet crudely cast pig-metal doll chair, claimed it was only store-bought gift she ever got as a child. Touched poet, who stood beside her chair embracing her while both wept. Later felt disturbed by excesses of sentimentality and struck Sister with sugar bowl. Violin put away until poet was "old enough."

8th. Bought Father and Mother subscription to *Collier's,* as poet had fallen under spell of author Sax Rohmer. Bought Sister eight-note xylophone. Tried to teach her "Taps." Enraged by her lack of talent and threw xylo in garbage can. Mother ruined instrument by washing it in dishpan. Poet given brown corduroy knickers with special pouch on leg for knife. Inside . . . Grandfather Clement's knife. Blood of the poet still evident under folded blades. Also gloves with fringe and star on cuffs. During afternoon stood on porch with gloves, shouting commands to the hopeless wind, crying on Major Reno to commit his troops before too late. Poet finally attacked by neighborhood ruffians throwing snowballs and crying "Sissy." Even imitation of Custer considered effeminate by present corrupt generation. Complained of this to Father, who said that Custer would have been better general if he had known when to retreat. Ideology of compromise unacceptable to poet.

9th. First Christmas in Blackhawk. Move to Blackhawk made under cover of much optimistic talk about giving poet nicer friends. Smaller town thought to conduce to his questionable manliness. But poet was sick for three weeks over Christmas. Carried to tree by Father, promptly vomited on presents. Sister vomited sympathetically. Received red-bound volume of *Boy Mechanic* bought by mail from Sears Roebuck. Later, lying in cocoon of fever heat and soprano smell of bile, heard parents discussing whether book was "too old" for poet. They implied lack of manual dexterity and recalled, so late, his inability to construct simple kite. Poet hysterically grasped book between his legs under the covers, determined to have something before he was too old for it.

10th. Another, bigger sled.

11th. Bought framed poem for Vonnie Searles. "Only Girl in World." Vonnie touched and in return touched poet as instructed. Claimed astonishment. Exorbitant flattery. Mother prejudiced against Vonnie. Called her "dirty girl." Could she have guessed? Christmas gifts received: Books—*Wonder of the War in the Air, Tarzan and the Jewels of Ophir* (already read), and *Boy Scout Handbook*. Own subscription to *Collier's,* as Nayland Smith engaged in new adventure with Fu Manchu. Reproduction of Lindbergh's "We" high in the titty clouds. All-steel savings bank.

12th. (Moved to Boda now. No signs of manliness recollected by poet except self-defense with ball bat against brother of Vonnie Searles after poet had boasted in boys' toilet of intimacy with sister. Boda was "real country"—fewer than five hundred souls at this time.) In exchange of presents in Seventh Grade poet gave Betty Otis small figurine in soap. Otis burst into tears at unwrapping. Claimed imputation against her personal hygiene. Poet sniggered, though he had been unaware of allusion until it was thus called to his attention. Father convinced that talk of "Depression" was merely Democrat lies. To show faith in future of American economy he bought poet a bicycle and Sister a fifteen-dollar doll house, both Sears Roebuck. At Christmas dinner quarreled with Uncle Cole and accused him of being "wet" for insisting that times were getting hard. Poet rode bicycle into countryside on Christmas afternoon. So moved by snowy grandeur, efficiency of new machine, and confidence in future of our economy, he dismounted in the woods near Bethel Church and masturbated on elm tree. On moss, indicating, to any Boy Scout, North. Post-ejaculatory nostalgia for friends left behind in Blackhawk and pangs of hypocritical guilt for unfaithfulness to Vonnie Searles.

13th. Father's melancholy stood like black Yule tree against the encompassing light. Father particularly regretted having sold poet's bicycle to son of banker in nearby Huntsville. Reasoned that since bank closed, banker should be impoverished with his clients. Once saw boy on poet's bike and tried to run him down with the Chevy. Had recently spent entire morning in outdoor privy with a razor while Mother, poet, and Sister pounded on walls and begged him to come out. An experience not to be repeated in mortal life. Poet given model airplane, all balsa construction, Sears Roebuck, $1.14, plus candy and nuts. After breakfast poet and Sister went to pasture below Baptist church to try the plane. Thin hard smell of frost from the tracked earth. Hope for success like an inhalation. Unless a miracle of wings

would rise, poet must howl. Plane leaped and lurched like a prayer, would not leave earth. Attempt at hand-launching splintered right wing. Sister more disappointed of two, but poet boxed her ears nevertheless. On way home encountered Father. Father had been watching from behind Olsen's cave and did not accept lie that plane had flown "keen." Snatched remnants from poet's hand and ran back to house. Claimed later he had returned it to Sears and Roebuck, demanding a refund from lying Jews who advertised it as "capable of six hundred foot flights." Later in the day poet took jelly sandwiches and walked into country with Harry Rinehart. Harry extremely bitter over fraud of Christmas. Insisted he had never been happy on that day and it occurred to poet he "never" had either. Pondered miracle of retroactive disappointment, that wisdom takes back the happiness of ignorance. "But you have to pretend to like it," Harry said, "so your damn parents won't be disappointed." Poet had intimations of manliness from Harry's philosophical example. Remembered the previous Christmas and resolved to stop childish habit of masturbation. Called self stoic.

14th. Stole a two-dollar compact for Margaret Shea. Touched penis with powder puff before gift wrapping. After school had resumed in January, poet driven to brink of insanity by appearance of disfiguring acne on Margaret's face. Consulted family doctor book. Transmission of venereal infection by this means apparently unrecorded in medical literature, but poet's whole life might have been exception to natural law.

15th. Aunt Velma with us since Uncle Cole's suicide. Disgusting ritual of complaint that she can't eat while she stuffs herself. Her sidelong, knowing smile as the gifts are unwrapped; *et in arcadia ego.* Her long yellow teeth signalling while she talked of nice sweater she had knitted Cole last year. To keep him warm from ass to *angst.* Later in the day more relatives in the house. Had not thought life had perpetrated so many. Poet expected to recite for them in recently developed baritone. Instead took his football and crossed pasture toward Harry Rinehart's. Saw Irene Lacey heading out of town along the railroad tracks. Followed at a discreet distance and observed her meeting with Jack Harmon, carrying .410. Frightened Nature with a horrid fantasy of her writhing on frost. Spent the remainder of disgusted afternoon practising forward passes into a railway culvert, alone.

16th. Rode with Wanzo Hopkins to Moorehead for movie. Mar-

garet Shea sitting on poet's lap. "Later," she whispered. Whispered same on way home. Poet so softened by pathos of *Hell's Angels* he expected love and death. Alone on the sofa of her front room she recited all she knew of poet's troubles with Irene Lacey. Declared herself henceforward unwilling to permit French kisses. Poet accused her of saving this ultimatum for Christmas and left the house in rage when the accusation was cheerfully admitted.

17th. (College.) Worked all day at the Hamilton Hotel, bussing dishes besides regular job because all other student help had gone home for holidays. Presents from H. Warwick Lloyd: a bottle of sweet muscatel and leatherbound copy of *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* too Biblical for his developing taste. After work poet walked into country with bottle, sat in the snow on a hill overlooking lake and got drunk. Night spoke to him in Zarathustrian periods. He replied. Later returned to campus and lay down in the street in front of Chisman Hall. Vague hopes of achieving immortality the ready and easy way (à la Chatterton, the other marvelous boy) if truck came by too swiftly. None came, because, Hardy says, none do. Poet caught cold from indiscretion.

18th. Worked at Hamilton Hotel. Under terrific pressure to come home because of Father's illness. Poet braced himself against such appeals by recalling the examples of decadents. Would Rimbaud have come home from Africa, Gauguin from Tahiti, Wilde from Paris because of parent's strangulated hernia? Spent afternoon in art building posing for Morrie Solomon. Result to be monument of Our Renaissance, like Stein by Picasso. Solomon flattered poet by remarking he had face of man of sorrows, though frivolous hair.

19th. A successful writer, poet remembered Machiavelli speaks of bathing, putting on fresh clothes, listening to music and then at last approaching his beloved mistress—writing. Alone at Emmy Polk's poet attempted this formula on Christmas day. After bath, pomade, and new necktie, felt it silly not to go somewhere. Walked past Sheila's sorority house, remembers sundown through black elms, snow and the ascending crows. Locked house seemed intact with secrets, as if girls had not gone home but had retired to some essential chamber no larger than a pinhead at core of house, there to be female in ways poet could never guess, as male. Tormented by excess of imagination, poet fantasied transvestite orgies involving himself and entire sorority dressed as a fraternity. Planned to stay all night by stealth in Sheila's room in order to observe what girls do in early morning. Driven from premises by watchman, later followed by police car.

20th. Error of taking Sheila home to Boda. Everything too reflexive. She, in whom everything comes to its second life, womb into which past discharges, ought never to be taken behind the scenes. Poet felt essential hostility between woman and art, competitors in perpetuation. Sheila wanted to make love in basement of Baptist Church, to "have" poet's first sex experience with Irene Lacey. Poet's refusal not understood, nor his term "holy" in relation to the so-profaned church basement. Sheila thought Harry Rinehart a boob and condescended to him while claiming respect. Misunderstood poet's relation of love to family. Said poet should show he loved them and not strike Sister. Love and demonstration. The poet opined, love not something done, but something known and felt. Poet felt fraud for pretending not to notice Father's nauseating table manners.

21st. (New York.) Lillian Esterman, Henderson Paul, and poet went to Brooklyn for visit with Schoenbergs, German refugees. Poet sided with Schoenberg brothers in predicting Hitler victory. Made up and cited many statistics on steel production, aircraft carburetors, bombsights, range of artillery, average training period of Stuka pilots, etc. Most of these invented statistics confirmed authoritatively by Kurt Schoenberg to rage of Lillian, who condemned poet as irresponsible and Schoenberg as anti-Semitic. Poet felt irresponsibility. On subway going home Lillian denounced poet's theories of chastity and vegetarianism as being inadequate response to threat of Hitlerism. She bought big steaks and cooked them in apartment in effort to demonstrate poet's fallibility even in his unworthy and psychotic riposte to Hitler crimes. Poet ate his usual lentil soup. After Henderson and Lillian bedded together (Lillian crying from beyond the wall to madden poet) poet drove fist through kitchen window in fit of remorse for dishonesty at Schoenbergs' and intransigence of sexual instinct.

22nd. (Washington.) Faithful attempt with Sheila to reconstruct personal Christmas within the given of society and unite in spirit with bourgeois fellows. Eclectic reading together from Scripture, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* O. Henry, and Charles Dickens. Gifts to street corner Santa Claus and elevator man in Sheila's building. Attended midnight mass. Long walk Christmas afternoon through Georgetown streets to Lincoln monument. Poet lachrymose over imagination of soldiers' Christmas in Army of Potomac. Toilsome he wandered in Virginia's woods. Wrapped Sheila in coat and watched flight of bombing planes heading south. Resolved not to enter services

except as medical attendant. Become homosexual like Whitman if necessary for consolation of troops.

23rd. (Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Little Rock, Arkansas.) Afternoon at the USO writing letters to Sheila and folks. Later, mix-up with MP's who hit poet across face with thongs on their billies. Poet taken to Provost Marshal's office at camp where MP's were rebuked for handling poet like a nigger. Poet insisted he was a nigger and was sent to hospital for psychiatric observation. There given position on enlisted staff and asked to stay.

24th. (Oxford, England.) Christmas dinner with Potters. Still season of illusion and hope. Poet careful to show he loved each member of Potter family individually. Cultivated Shavian dryness of manner for Mama P. Uttered barbaric yawps for Gerald and pretended to accept the good faith of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. Gossiped about the Royal Family with Cecile. Played "Red River Valley" and other hill-billy songs on harmonica after dinner. Poet extremely touched by Potters' gift of a manuscript poem by Sassoon (though not impressed by poem.)

25th. (Orleans, France.) Bad letters from both Cecile and Sheila arriving the same day. Poet depressed but refusing to admit guilt for the evil that has shepherded his military days. At worst claimed military license and indoctrination in spirit of "If you can't screw it or eat it, piss on it." At best would insist that apparently deep dishonor of acts would accrue "far off interest of tears." Reminded self that a poet's first duty is to stay alive. In afternoon of Great Day rode with waist-gunner of B-24 on a mission to Liège. Purifying cold like the origin of song. Land beneath tempting as candy, even to great sinner. Moist light when the sun broke through from the North Sea. All praise to Thee, Great Author of our death. In evening poet composed fourteen strict lines of verse describing how ME-109 had killed him on mission just flown. Conceived of self as Santa in a B-24. Down your chimneys, Liège!

26th. (Port of Embarkation. Cherbourg.) Disgorging of loot from the fallen continent. Pistols, cameras, sabers, and a busby. More blessed to throw in the trash barrel than to keep. Adoo, adoo to the fable of corpses and the lie of guns. The next hero will be the spy with his knife at the throat of the Atom Bomber. This werewolf's occupation's gone. From the manger bed vaults the tiger. Greet me home, citizens. Everything is over except life.

DAVID GLADISH:

She

What arcane dark
Animal economy
Connected woman-
Kind and creatures?

Stuck in the boon dock,
Keeping a pretty
Widow's household,
Once I wondered.

Two hens chuckled
Upstairs; downstairs
Hatching ducklings,
Dank in the seeping
Cellar, quickened.

This house smelled of
Musty mammals:
Red hound, black dog,
Coon-dog, lap-dog,
House dogs—indolent,
Livingroom-cluttering
Kennel club catalogue—
Cat, alive inside,
Big b' the fireside,
Every last dead-asleep one
Gone Jordanside.

Childhood breathed
Aloft all softly,
Claw-sore cheek where
Cat alive gored her
Under the tablecloth,
Knit with intricate
Blood-clot flesh knots.

Awful life all
Absent, ancient and
Tender slumber
Turned articulate:

"All our job is
Breath and life-blood,
Her reward but
Our vitality."

This arcane dark
Animal apology,
Heart-beat mystery,
Drowsed about me.

JULIA MARIA MORRISON:

Rounding April

Ill at evening,
Bored with weather-watching,
We might conceive a simpler form
And let it drift.
Last month we had a fire about,
Tonight it drips;
The change could be to wind.

Ill: a kind of lock
To keep the ordinary out;
Seasons can go without our caring
And summer means . . . changing the mop.
Those who sleep were never half so weary
As these not ill and new
That contemplate a change of sun.

Ill at evening,
Lost in terminals

Or plans we hadn't made,
Some of us, like the weather, stop
Excited at the future of the skies.
It is wise innmen who provide good light.

The Exchange

Of the mansion the dirt and the rags,
Of elegance carved to the size
Of a mouse, and hands reddened
By fear, good air turned sallow
For want of wind: trees despair,
Saying, "It's your move."
The landlord waits not seeing how
The windows have gone blurred
As honeymoons and tax men pass without a try.
Sometimes the country cramps
Those elements that bear on wind
Or turns reluctance
In.

HELEN NEVILLE:

A Red, Red Rose

"The ladies of the Upstate Garden Club have elected the red rose as the national flower of the United States."
—News item in *This Week*, N. Y. *Herald-Tribune*.

Only a miracle can live
at the bright center Red is for angels And this
does not mean
that John must go mad or Mary

get drunk with the man who called to fix the pipes Nor
on the other hand
are we permitted to leave fruitrinds and empty coca cola
bottles
in the dark wood Beauty I know
is treacherous silent slow
the thin
transparent flue-pink skin
the sun defames in shuddering wastes of power
crepusculations of
cocaine or love
whose aim's to kill the myth
clouding our monuments and stones of breath

Bright Rose whose regal fist
closes without a twist
over the coral and the amethyst
the quivering spectrum spread
in circles from your red
Brief Rose whose valor takes
the whispered islands of our flak and flake
Rose that says I am a
rose as a tree might say I
am a tree or a man
I am a man

I shall not expect highways or supermarkets
to blossom from your stem
Monster though you are
I shall not clip you for the dinnertable
Rose when your red encloses me
as your petals form around the bee
I'm sped past arrogant chords and primal noons
and Venus with her doves
and all majorities
until I reach the waning of the moon
the worn periphery the crippled shard
raped by a golden fruit
and lie between the magpie and the crow
knowing that blood is red because death wills it so

CAROL SHARPE:

Kate McCuskey

In the evening old wounds bothered her as she sat in her leather chair turned towards the window. There was a long curving scar on the inside of her left ankle where a scythe had caught it years ago, and there were smaller scars on her hands from cuts inflicted during canning season. But she looked out her window hoping for passersby until night chased day up the quiet street to the edge of her lawn: she saw it coming there, stalking the pampas grass bush beside the climbing driveway, stalking the maples, the elm, the portulaca beds, the cropped lawn. She was restless, the knee she had sprained on the farm as a girl ached, and she leaned her cane against one arm of the chair while she massaged the ache with a long hand. The knuckles were thickened on that hand, and the fingers were flesh transparent on the bone. Then into her eyes came the gray of dusk with blue lingering around the black iris, and over her face crept the pallor of loneliness and death.

Perhaps on Sunday evenings the room behind her waited chaotic, sticky from the jellied fingers of her grandchildren, and empty of them. The hired woman washing up in the kitchen would soon put that to rights; it was therefore no concern of the old lady's. She sat looking until the windowpane reflected her long sweet melancholy face and her crown of white hair with the one striking deep wave across the brow pointing downward at her left temple. Her arthritic hand on that temple traced a thin vein through which thin blood raced. And then it was time to go to bed.

It was as difficult to prepare for bed as it was easy to get up in the morning. When the housekeeper came to help her to rise from her chair, the old woman grasped the knob of her many-faceted cane, one long hand laid painfully over the other, and with a hand beneath her armpit and an alien voice urging in her ear she rose, hesitated, staggered off down the buckling floor to come at last to the short hallway and then to her bedroom door and finally to the high straightbacked chair beside her narrow bed. She sat there nightly, a captive queen, not letting go the cane until the last possible minute while the thin dark chattering woman her children had hired to care for her disrobed

her. She suffered the intrusive fingers at her neck as the floorlength dress was unbuttoned and eased down over her broad bony shoulders. And she bore the rest of it with a patient smile, and a distant gaze became blue again in the lamplight. The room was too familiar; she had never any need to look at anything in it; had she been able to walk unassisted, she could have found her way around it and over the whole old house blindfolded.

When she lay prone, her clean white nightdress smoothed down over her flaccid thighs, her narrow feet side by side and her cane within reach leaning against the nighttable, it was time to stare for a long time at the ceiling with the light on; like a little child she took comfort in the light and held her eyes open sometimes by force in order to enjoy its beneficence as long as possible. Sometimes she would ring her bell and demand a fresh glass of water; sometimes she would complain of headache; sometimes she asked to be helped to the bathroom ten minutes after having been settled. Even so, it was always early when she went to sleep, six-thirty or seven in winter and eight-thirty or nine in summer, depending upon the season and the life of each season's daylight. With her eyes closed finally and tension leaving every nerve in her wasted body she fell into sleep as into an open grave; frequently she forced herself awake again for a minute or two having experienced semi-consciously the dreadful sensation of falling. She slept soundly then for two or three hours, but from midnight on she was apt to be startled or even alarmed by noises, and the first birdcall in the trees outside found her fully awake, listening, her face turned toward the shaded window to catch the first yellow shaft of sunlight over the lilac.

She sat in the brown leather chair while the woman dusted and vacuumed behind her; her own highcut shoes were always dusty although it had been a year, two years since she had been out of the house for a walk. Her married daughters visited her often; her sons-in-law took her for rides in their automobiles and joked with her. But they came and went many times with no more than a faint polite nod from her, except for one, a granddaughter who sat on the arm of her chair and worshipped her, a small brown-eyed girl with olive skin and a lively smile. It was for her that the housekeeper made cookies every Saturday and hid them away from all the cousins on Sunday until she could come and share two on a plate with the grandmother. And often she would drop in after school to sit with her grandmother, staring up at her and smiling, to tell her of everything that had happened along the way from school. The snails they thought about, the frost-riven curbstones, the wind in the pine trees all made more sense to the old

lady than anything else she heard. But she listened for another step, and occasionally when the little girl was in the room she thought she heard it. Raising her head, the refined profile cleaving the air, the fading eyes eager, she said several times, "Charles, is that you, Charles?" It was the name of her one son, long since dead. The little girl shared her grief when he did not come to stand beside his mother's chair, his great happy tenor laugh booming out, his kiss on her white hair.

The old lady's favorite son-in-law was the little girl's father, a small muscular brown-eyed man with the voice of a Russian basso. He found her in tears one Sunday afternoon when all the family had left but for him and his wife and daughter. All his customary swagger failed him as he put his warm vital hand over her old cold ones on the cane and asked, "Kate, oh now, Kate, what is it after all?"

She lifted her swimming blue eyes to his and the tears streamed down her thinskinned cheeks as she said in a strangled voice, "I want to go home, oh, I want to go home."

Her daughter came to sit on a hassock before her and said with a white strained face, "But, Mother, you are home. This is your home where you have lived for fifty years. This is where we all grew up. It is your home."

All the old woman could do was to weep.

Then her son-in-law, who was suffering, said loudly, "By God, then, get your hat and coat and come on. You don't have to stay here if you don't want to. I'll take you home now." He called the housekeeper and they put the old lady into a black cloth coat with a worn fur collar and put on her head a Queen Mary hat. Leaning heavily on the ebony cane she went out of that room and out of the house to the drive where his Chevrolet was parked. The housekeeper helped move her legs up into the car and said goodbye to her as she sat weeping but expectant, nodding to her daughter and granddaughter in the yard. The women were glad for the breathing spell. Watching the car back down the drive the daughter asked the housekeeper, "Is she always like this now?" but the housekeeper answered deferentially that this was a new quirk. And they waited.

Within half an hour the Chevrolet was coming back up the drive, and as it pulled to a stop the son-in-law called merrily, "I've brought her home. She's home!"

The old woman turned her head slowly, fearfully. When she saw the pampas grass bush, the portulaca, the elms, the side door shaded by lilac and maple, the sweetest of all her smiles appeared tremulously,

and her shoulders slumped forward and down in the loose coat as though a great weight had been lifted from them. Then, fairly erect, assisted only by the small man at her side, she came the last perilous journey up the walk and through the door of her home. With the qualifying air of the grand old lady, she said to him in a whispering voice, "How can I ever thank you, my dear?" and then, to her granddaughter, "You don't know how good it is to be home."

MYRON TURNER:

The Witch of Pruzana

Mother, give me the sun. (*Ghosts,* Act III)

Kalya, Kalya, help me to find
a smallgold charm. Kalya, bring
your stick, your magic eye, be kind,

the fever's made my grandson blind,
he lost his mother's holy ring.
Kalya, Kalya, help me to find

her lucky saintsday ring, his mind
is gone, oh, come to us and sing,
with your stick, your magic eye, be kind,

and do not let me stay behind
my daughter, now her son. The King
Kalya, Kalya, help me to find

the King who loved her and enshrined
her tears at his feet. On entering
with your stick, your magic eye, be kind,

and cross yourself at the door to remind
me my death will settle everything.
Kalya, Kalya, help me to find
a stick, a magic eye, be kind.

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